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ABSTRACT

Based on the premise that senior staff or high-level managers have the knowledge and experience required to make daily decisions and also have a degree of power and respect, this document proposes that these managers are in a position to be effective leaders who can and should foster an atmosphere of receptiveness for innovation and positive attitudes by giving a fair hearing and support to junior staff members' ideas, trusting in their professional abilities, encouraging them to strive for excellence, and keeping open communication lines. A scenario is presented that describes communication patterns that the low-level manager might use to transmit potential ideas and/or policies. Based on the experience of an academic library, this scenario includes an itemization of obstacles to the reception of low-level management ideas and a discussion of how these obstacles can be overcome. Other benefits to be gained by high-level managers' receptivity to junior staff member's ideas and suggestions are explained. It is suggested that high-level managers will have a dynamic library organization that impresses its clientele if they utilize these ideas. (14 references) (CGD)

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EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION: HIGH-LEVEL MANAGEMENT RECEPTIVE TO LOW-LEVEL MANAGEMENT IDEAS

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EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION: HIGH-LEVEL MANAGEMENT RECEPTIVE TO LOW-LEVEL MANAGEMENT IDEAS

The job advertisement reads: Anyname Library: Librarian II. Required: ALA-MLS; strong interpersonal skills; willingness to develop and participate in existing services; can communicate efficiently with all levels of clients. Preferred: Strong evidence of managerial skills and independent judgement.

This example of a generic job description found in today's professional literature is a common delineation of the type of leadership qualitites the entry level manager candidate is expected to have. Yet why do entrants feel their expected leadership qualitites are seldomly utilized? Are high-level managers afraid to use their potential ideas by incorporating their thoughts into daily policies and procedures? Does senior management fear a loss of power or control? Lower-level managers naturally perceive their supervisors as leadership mentors, yet many times established managers do not seem to exhibit basic qualities expected in the entrant.

Junior staff or low-level managers are those who are new to the library profession or new to the library organization. They usually have minimal supervisory duties. Basically, they are on the bottom rung of the management ladder.

Senior staff or high-level managers make final decisions. Depending upon the nature of given problems, decision makers may be library directors, area supervisors or department heads. High-level managers have the knowledge and experience required to make necessary daily decisions. These positions carry with them a degree of power and

respect. Riggs (1985) stated that "power is not a process that necessarily has to hurt anybody, and it does not have to be hostile; it is simply the ability to make decisions, to take risks, to lead, and to get things done."

Those who have power are in the position to be effective leaders. They should and can foster an atmosphere of receptiveness for innovations and positive attitudes by giving support to junior staff members' ideas, trusting in their professional abilities, encouraging them to strive for excellence, and keeping open communication lines. Of course not all ideas offered by junior staff members will be practical or even worthwhile, but their ideas need to be given a fair hearing by high-level management. Otherwise, how will low-level managers know the calibre of their concepts unless library leaders are listening and giving feedback?

The following scenarios describe communication patterns the low-level manager might use to transmit potential ideas and/or policies. Two characters, Jane and Dick, will be used to exemplify the scenarios. Jane and Dick are traditional new academic library employees.

A new book title for acquisition must be submitted to Jane's supervisor, then to the Head of Reference, then to the Associate Director for Public Services and finally to the Library Director. Jane wondered why two or three people had to okay the purchase of a $3.96 pamphlet on child abuse. Jane presented to her supervisor a written recommendation that in cases of normal book purchases, order requests should go to the Head of Reference. Only those of $150.00 or more

should be perused by the Associate Director for Public Services. The Library Director really had no need to see each individual book acquisition. In this scenario, Jane adhered to the rules by submitting a written recommendation for a new policy to the hierarchy as described in her manual of procedures. A procedures manual offers the first authoritative contact a junior staff member has in communicating upward through the administrative structure hence this is the most likely channel to be used by them.

In the next scenario Jane approached her supervisor who, because of a shortage in staff, was strapped for time to complete all her/his duties. Jane said she was caught up with her work and offered to help her supervisor with some minor task. As time went on, Jane assumed more duties from her supervisor. Once vacant staff positions were filled, Jane's supervisor was no longer devoting her/his time to extra duties, yet he/she continued to reward Jane with additional responsibilities such as administering special projects, writing department reports, etc. Jane was perceived by others in the department as having more power because of her responsibilities, assignments and willingness to be a team player. By exchanging favors, Jane displayed to her supervisor the ability to handle responsibilities.

Meanwhile, our other new employee, Dick, noticed that the microfilm reader-printer was usually out of order. He became upset as the situation continued even after he requested to have the equipment replaced several times. Dick pondered a resolution to this problem in

light of budgetary restraints. He had noticed quite a few new books in his supervisor's research area, books obviously bought for personal use rather than the predetermined areas of collection development.

Dick approached his supervisor about the urgency of obtaining the new microfilm reader-printer. His supervisor said there was no money, so Dick mentioned that the books the department had been receiving did not really meet collection development standards for the area. He wondered if the supervisor knew how this happened and whether it should be reported. Dick mentioned that the estimated cost of these materials would cover the cost of replacing the old microfilm reader-printer.

Dick thus communicated his ideas for new equipment by threatening his supervisor and by appealing to the supervisor's moral/ethical standards. The use of intimidation is not an effective communication pattern, but it is sometimes used when things are not going as the low-level staff member expected.

Dick also had a wonderful idea for developing a bibliographic instruction program using a library skills workbook. He felt all freshmen students would benefit from a program concentrated on developing library skills. He and his co-workers, including his supervisor, were anxious to implement this idea for next year's freshmen class. Dick carefully documented his plan in detail and verbally highlighted it to the director. After a few weeks passed and nothing had happened, Dick mentioned his idea to a few friends in the English Department, who expressed much interest. A representative from the English Department then convinced the library director to implement

the program. Dick thereby manipulated the situation by using external pressure to communicate his program ideas.

The lesson here for upper level administrators is listen to how junior staff members communicate to you. Many junior staff members simply do not feel as if their ideas are heard. Why do they feel this way? One reason is the limited means of communicating dictated by a managing down hierarchy. White, Dittrich, and Lang (1980) indicated, "the use of inappropriate structures, such as managing down, can lead to limited innovation capacity and low commitment or lack of staff participation in the decision making process." Junior management can make suggestions for improvement but an absence of reaction to ideas leads to frustration and indifference. Creativity and innovation are squelched. Junior staff members adapt to a daily routine and stop looking for ways to improve their areas. The communication pattern in a managing down hierarchy is dehumanizing because it does not allow reaction by junior staff members; there is a strong feeling that the decision has already been made and put into place. Darling and Cluff (1987) reinforce the ideas of White, Dietrich and Lange (1980) by indicating that junior staff members be allowed to manage up and that high-level managers be more open to ideas and willing to depart from traditional methods. The influence of junior staff members on policies indicates an effective organizational structure.

The second reason that managers may not be receptive to low-level ideas is that, the more a manager lets a subordinate make decisions, the more he/she feels a loss of power or influence. Yet, a junior

staff member would have more respect for his/her supervisor if he/she sees that ideas are at least being considered or heard. Martell (1987) stated that "more people with more power results in better productivity." After all, employees would be challenged and find more meaning in their work when allowed input. Doing tasks beyond one's normal responsibilities contributes to the betterment of the organization and gives the junior member the satisfaction of having participated. Conroy and Jones (1986) find that sharing decisions, responsibilities and work is not giving up power but empowering others, thereby sharing power. This sharing is a practical method for achieving results for the overall library program, or, to borrow a phrase, "two heads are better than one."

The third reason is that, human nature being what it is, most people are hesitant to reveal their weaknesses. Studies over the years have shown that often people are afraid to ask a reference librarian for assistance for fear of appearing ignorant. Low-level managers may suspect that high-level managers are afraid to ask junior staff members for ideas for fear of appearing uninformed regarding new technologies, new techniques or management strategies. High-level managers often do not have time to keep up with advancements in technology and, being forced to rely on professional journals, may not have the expertise of recently graduated low-level managers. Therefore high-level managers in the information gathering/providing industry should not ignore the experience and/or knowledge of low-level managers.

These three obstacles can be overcome as demonstrated by the

experience of North Texas State University librarians, as cited in an article by Galloway (1987). During a retreat, upper-level administrators found that junior staff members felt alienated from the decision-making process and that decisions were made without staff input. The associate director of the library suggested a project of setting up the library's budget, using three junior staff members, one clerical staff member and the associate director. The group successfully demonstrated that they could not only handle the responsibility, but also contribute suggestions that were both creative and useful. This valuable exercise allowed many of the members to advance to higher job positions. The North Texas State University Library proved the advantages of keeping low-level management happy by using the technique of cooperative communication. In return, this library benefited from the outstanding work of its employees.

The lesson is that reinforcement of their ideas and suggestions will have positive effects on the junior staff. Not all ideas will be workable, but other ideas may spring from these suggestions. Bad ideas should not be summarily dismissed but discussed as to why they would not work. Such feedback may allow junior staff to transform the suggestion into a more feasible and workable idea. Basic communications, either via discussion or written memos, are important as a method of reinforcing the junior staff members' effectiveness within the library organization. These basic communications may include reasons why an idea would not work. For example, a suggestion may already have been unsuccessfully attempted by the organization.

Taking a moment to outline why or how a particular program had been unsuccessful could benefit junior staff members who have not yet developed the "that is the way it's always been done" syndrome.

The senior staff member must be willing to take risks and be willing to learn from whomever the teacher may be. This creates a good leader model because, according to Amram (1987), the senior staff "must have an openness to new ideas, enjoy challenges and must tolerate ambiguity." If the low-level manager senses that a supervisor is an excellent leader model, there will be more satisfaction on the job and an increased level of performance and productivity. Energy creates more energy.

This energy can be put to good use via the principle of participative management or other management techniques that are receptive to ideas from everyone at all levels within the library organization. Using these styles of management makes work challenging and can negate problems like burnout, apathy, low morale and other attitudal dilemmas. Griffon (1986) discovered that "the real difference between organizational success and failure is no doubt determined by the degree to which the library utilizes the energies and talents of its people."

High-level managers need to be receptive to low-level managers' ideas. By utilizing these ideas, high-level managers will have a dynamic library organization that impresses its clientele.

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